

torre's take

with Joe Torre

Throwing Out Runners

A key skill for any catcher to master is the proper technique in throwing to second or third base to get a runner out. This is a difficult throw that takes some repetition to get right, so be patient and allow plenty of time for gradual improvement. To be sure, there is no greater thrill for the defense than to see a runner get tagged out when the ball has not been put in play by the batter.

All catchers need to pay attention to the runners. After a little experience, you will become a pretty good judge of when a runner is going to try to steal a base. This anticipation will help when making the throw to get the runner out.

First, let's assume that you are a right-handed catcher. Start by placing your right hand behind your glove, as you receive the ball from the pitcher. Make every effort to center the ball the best you can and to keep your body in a good athletic position. (see Screen #1) After you have secured the ball, move your glove hand toward your right shoulder, meeting your throwing hand near your chin. (see Screen #2) This prepares you for a quick transfer of the ball from your glove hand to your throwing hand. On low pitches or pitches to your left, rake the ball to the right position, being careful to retain control of the ball. (Coaches: Securing the ball and making the exchange from the glove to the throwing hand requires good hand-eye coordination and excellent technique. This may take quite a few repetitions before a player is comfortable, especially with younger players. Once they have developed the confidence in making the exchange, it will become second nature.)

If you are throwing to second base, be sure to plant your right foot as the ball gets into the glove. This helps to maintain balance and provides a good base of support for the long throw you are about to make. (see Screen #3) On pitches down the middle or to the right, your pivot foot should move directly behind the ball to maintain proper throwing balance. For pitches to the left, your pivot foot should not go beyond the mid-point of your original stance. As you prepare to make the throw, your landing foot and shoulders should be in direct line with the target. Be sure to stay down and back for maximum power during the throw. (see Screen #4) Execute the throw with authority and proper technique, aiming for the corner of the bag on the first base side. Always try to use a four-seam grip and short arm motion.



Screen #1



Screen #4A



Screen #2



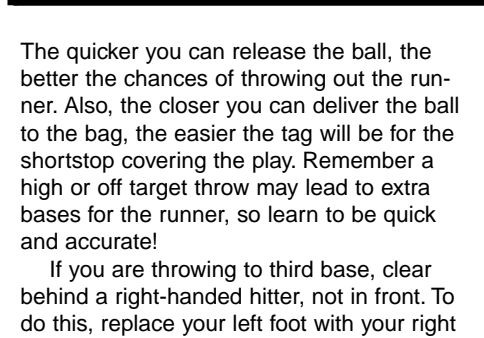
Screen #4B



Screen #3



Screen #5



Screen #6

The quicker you can release the ball, the better the chances of throwing out the runner. Also, the closer you can deliver the ball to the bag, the easier the tag will be for the shortstop covering the play. Remember a high or off target throw may lead to extra bases for the runner, so learn to be quick and accurate!

If you are throwing to third base, clear behind a right-handed hitter, not in front. To do this, replace your left foot with your right foot, keeping your feet and shoulders in direct line with your target the whole time. (see Screen #5) If there is a pitch far outside the right knee you can jab step to the ball, clearing in front of a right-handed hitter to make the throw. (see Screen #6) The throw to third is shorter than the throw to second, but accuracy is even more important here. An errant throw could lead to a run scored for your opponent.

Mastering this skill is something that requires a great deal of practice and repetition. With younger players, it is important to emphasize proper technique, and to encour-

age them by gradually increasing the difficulty and speed of the play during practice. A good rhythm, flow and throwing precision will come with time.

The next time you see one of your favorite Big League catchers throw out a base stealer, just remember that it took countless hours and repetitions to become so precise. While you may never be a major league catcher, there is no reason you cannot become a little bit better every day by learning proper technique and practicing your throwing skills.